

RUTLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Quarterly

VOLUME 36 No. 3

2006

“People Make A Library” The Rutland Free Library at 120 Years



RUTLAND FREE LIBRARY

Left back vertical row: June Osowski, children's librarian; Deborah Higgins, circulation supervisor; Heather Ruelke, circulation assistant; Gretchen Nichol, circulation assistant; Matthew Roy, circulation assistant; Jacob Sherman, reference librarian. Right front vertical row: Liz McRae, circulation assistant; Alex Beswick-Couturier, assistant director; Anita Waite, circulation assistant; Paula Baker, director; Ronald Lurvey, custodian. Not pictured: Caroline Marotti, circulation assistant and Rhoda Horne, bookkeeper.

About the Author

Jacob Sherman has been the reference and technical services librarian at the Rutland Free Library since 1972. He has also served as secretary of the Rutland Historical Society and co-chair of its Publications Committee. His most recent contribution to the Society's publications was "Then and Now: A Calendar," *Rutland Historical Society Quarterly* (Vol. 35 No.4).

Introduction

The year 2006 marks the 120th anniversary of the founding of the Rutland Free Library. It has been twelve decades since a group of dedicated Rutland women led by Julia C.R. Dorr ended a long period of civil inertia by launching a free public library on the second floor of the Glynn Block at 23 Merchants Row.

We have all heard of centennials and sesquicentennials but why celebrate the 120th? In the library's case it is because so much has changed since its centennial was observed in 1986. Physically, there has been a large new addition that was completed in 1989-90 and through grant funds the interior has acquired an entirely new look. In 1986, the library's audio-visual collection consisted of phonograph records and a few videos; today there are thousands of CDs, DVDs, videos and audiocassettes occupying an entire room. Twenty years ago patrons still used the card catalog to look up books as they did a century ago; today the computer enables one to access the collection, as well as dozens of external databases, from home. Inside the library are computers that the public can utilize for a host of new practical purposes undreamed of 20 years ago.

While the library is continually changing, in the end its history comes down to people – those who founded it, those who nurtured it through the years, the public that uses it more than ever, and the staff that serves them. What follows is an attempt to present this continually evolving story.

The *Quarterly* is published by the Rutland Historical Society, 96 Center Street, Rutland VT 05701-4023. Co-editors: Jim Davidson and Jacob Sherman. Copies are \$2 each plus \$1 per order. Membership in the Society includes a subscription to the *Quarterly* and the *Newsletter*. Copyright © 2006 The Rutland Historical Society, Inc. ISSN 0748-24493.

“People Make A Library” The Rutland Free Library at 120 Years

By Jacob Sherman

One of the largest public libraries in the state and the home of more than 90,000 volumes and audio-visual items, the Rutland Free Library can look back on a 120-year history that saw its beginnings in two rented rooms on Merchants Row. A relatively small group of dedicated women saw the need for a free public library and launched it. Others nurtured it through times of financial difficulty. Through a series of moves, renovations and expansions it has arrived at its present state.

Between 1850 and 1880 Rutland could aptly be described as a “boom town.” The railroads had arrived at the end of the 1840s creating a construction boom on a new street called Merchants Row. The marble industry was beginning to establish itself creating opportunities for an influx of immigrants. In the 1850s alone the population had tripled to 7,500 and by 1880 it had doubled again to 15,000. Downtown had shifted from Main Street along the park to Merchants Row where travelers off the train were welcomed by restaurants, retailers, and two grand hotels.

The Beginnings of a Library

Despite this rapid growth, by 1880 the city still lacked a public library. Over the years there had existed the occasional “subscription library” where members might borrow a book for a fee, but these tended to serve primarily the upper classes. The needs of the new immigrants from Ireland, Italy, Canada, and elsewhere who had come to build the railroads and toil in the marble quarries and factories were not met.

The need for a library had been talked about for twenty years. Finally, in early 1886 some of the more prominent women in the community decided that the time had arrived for action. In January 63 women gathered at the home of Mary Daniel. A week later more than 100 met at the North Main Street residence of Dr. and Mrs. Allen. The women reached two important decisions.

First, they decided to raise funds to start a library by sponsoring an "exhibition" at the Clement Bank Building. Orchestras would play and the public could view "valuable and interesting curiosities and historical articles" such as a deck of playing cards reputed to have been used by the Mexican General Santa Anna prior to the Battle of San Jacinto. There would also be a cooling iron that had served as the murder weapon in a notorious Rutland murder committed in 1814. This exhibition was held 9 to 12 February 1886, and raised over \$300 for the library as well as pledges and subscriptions amounting to \$2,494.25, including \$1,000 from Julia Dorr.

The second key decision reached by the women's group was to elect Julia Dorr as its president. A member of the Rutland Ripleys, perhaps the city's most distinguished family, she had resided in Rutland most of her life. Her father, William H. Ripley, was a leading businessman and civic figure who established himself in the marble industry in the late 1840s. Her two brothers played important roles in the Civil War. Colonel William Y. W. Ripley was the wounded hero of the Battle of Malvern Hill and General Edward Hastings Ripley was the dashing young commandant who occupied Richmond following the surrender at Appomattox.

Julia numbered among her friends and correspondents the leading literary lights of the day including Emerson, Longfellow, Holmes and Whittier. She even entertained Emerson at her home, "The Maples," that overlooked Otter Creek. Her writings consisted of novels, poetry, travelogues and even a manual of advice for young marrieds and were very popular at the time. Involved in most community cultural activities, she was a leader in Friends in Council and for a quarter of a century a member of the Shakespeare Club. In 1880 she was asked to become president of The Fortnightly, the intellectual and literary society of the women of the Grace Congregational Church. She occupied this position for the next 30 years and left an imprint on this group so deep that even today its meetings are opened by readings from her works.

There then ensued what might be termed a "battle of the sexes." Several of the leading men of the town felt that while the women had gotten things off to an auspicious start it was now time for male leadership. Julia and the women of the community felt that for 20 years the males had done little and that overall management was best left in the hands of the women.

There occurred a heated meeting at Baxter Hall on 20 February at which these conflicting sentiments were voiced. When it came down to a vote, the *Herald* reported, the nine men present were

excluded and the 48 ladies present signed the articles of incorporation. Having firmly established themselves at the controls, the ladies then proceeded to create book and investment committees of which one half the membership was to be composed of men.

Another issue dividing the sexes was the matter of Memorial Hall. Just in the process of being built at that time Memorial Hall was primarily to serve as a museum and gathering place for the area's many Civil War veterans. Constructed of marble donated by area firms, it was an imposing and monumental structure entered via a grand stairway. It occupied the site of the present Post Office and Federal Building. The men wanted a commitment that the library would occupy basement quarters in the Hall but Julia Dorr and the ladies resisted. For one thing the hall was not yet finished and no formal invitation had been extended. For another, the women were anxious to establish "a functioning library ... at the earliest possible moment." To wait for Memorial Hall would be to dissipate the initial excitement and energy. It would be like "letting the porridge cool while we argue about the spoon."

On 5 July 1886, the Rutland Free Library formally opened its doors in two rented rooms in the Glynn Block at 23 Merchants Row. The Library began life with a collection of 3,234 books as well as the services of a dedicated librarian, Miss Julia P. Humphrey. The *Herald* declared the event was "an important one in this growing town," and hoped that the new, large, valuable and free public library would change the impression — we do not know how or when it was created — that Rutland was not a literary place.

The first few years were encouraging with circulation reaching 20,000 volumes a year. The library was open five and a half hours daily as well as Saturday evenings.

The Memorial Hall Years

In March 1888 an official invitation was extended to move the library to Memorial Hall. The following year the library was moved to the basement of Memorial Hall where it would remain for the next 41 years.

As impressive as Memorial Hall appeared from the outside, it never proved very successful as a shrine to the G.A.R. While the upper floor did house the weapons, uniforms, and relics of the Union veterans, no provision had been made for their care and the atmosphere soon became one of dust and neglect. Nor did it prove an amiable and comfortable setting in which the veterans could meet. By the 1890s the Roberts Post, G. A. R., had rented a hall on

Merchants Row and was meeting there.

As time passed Memorial Hall came to be more thought of as the home of the library. Occupying quarters on the east side lower level, the library experienced years of growth but also financial struggle. In 1897 under the leadership of Mary L. Titcomb, the library had tripled its book collection to 10,317 and attained an annual circulation of 63,243. However, support had dwindled and the town appropriation proved insufficient.

The financial situation reached its most dire point in March 1898 when it was reported that the library had only \$24.29 in its treasury to last through the following November. Periodical subscriptions could not be renewed nor was it possible to buy new books. Even the reading room was closed. Clinging to optimism, the association vice-president wrote in her annual report: "We confidently hope and expect that the clouds will be lifted and the crooked paths made straight." Julia Dorr added: "In looking back over the long path with all its perils and quicksands, I wonder we ever dared to venture on such a project without an assured income." Perhaps Julia regretted having disregarded the advice of a Boston librarian who had warned her 12 years earlier not even to consider starting a public library without an assured annual income of \$5,000!

Somehow the crisis was averted, and in 1911 a reception was held to mark the library's 25th anniversary. At this time Mrs. J.W. Ross indicated that the lower floor of Memorial Hall was "very inadequate to our needs." She added that the city's children deserved a large room of their own. Marking the occasion was a moving congratulatory letter from Julia Dorr. "It is long since I have been able to attend one of your annual meetings," she wrote. "But I have never lost interest in your library, never faltered in my allegiance to it. I am proud that I was your first president." Less than two years later, on 18 January 1913, Julia died at "The Maples" at the age of 88.

In 1911 the library maintained small traveling libraries in schools at Center Rutland and Cheney Hill. It also hosted a series of story hours featuring the storytelling of Mrs. Wellington Bragg. Among the groups donating gifts of books and cash were the Rutland Boys' Club, the Lend-a-Hand Club, and Friends in Council. After 25 years the library association still contained some of its charter members. By 1926 the book collection had grown to 27,368 while circulation reached 78,201. The city of Rutland provided an appropriation of \$5,500 that year and \$200 came from Rutland Town.

The library might have long remained in Memorial Hall but by the mid-1920s outside forces were at work that would alter its destiny.

The federal government had its eye on Memorial Hall as the site for a new post office and federal building and proposed to the city that it receive in exchange for that site the old courthouse and post office located at the corner of Center and Court Streets. On 16 November 1925, the city board of aldermen authorized Mayor James Dunn to make that exchange, but for the next four years little happened. Finally, on 7 February 1930, the warranty deed for the West Street property was officially turned over to the federal government. By December 1930 the U.S. was ready to proceed with demolition of Memorial Hall. The Rutland Free Library was given just two weeks to vacate its furnishings and move 30,000 books.

Since the Court Street building would require extensive renovations before it could serve as a library, moving there directly was impossible. It was therefore decided to occupy a room on the second floor of Longfellow School on what was thought to be a temporary basis. In a 1936 talk Cynthia M. Gorton, who served as head librarian from 1926 to 1943, recalled those momentous days:

"We had no home and a very short time to find one, as we were to move in two weeks.... I asked for a month, but the powers-that-be said that two weeks was long enough, his contention being that if we had a fire we could get out in one day or night, as the case might be."

"We finally decided to take one room in a school house as we were to be there only a very short time. But after we had gotten there no one else seemed in a hurry. There was no money to remodel the old post office. The people did not want to vote the amount, and so we were at a standstill."

The library was still in its "temporary" home three years later at which time the Friends published a brochure entitled "How Long Shall Rutland Suffer for Lack of Proper Library Building." Blasting the present library as "shockingly inadequate" and a "reproach" to the state's second most populous city, the broadside reminded citizens that the library continued to be crowded into a single room and that one-third of its 32,000 volumes were "stored in the basement like heaps of coal" while another third were squirreled away in the school attic and only accessible with difficulty. The public could remedy the situation by passing a \$21,000 bond issue at the polls on 4 September 1933. By this action the city could avail itself of a further \$9,000 in federal matching funds through the Works Progress Administration.

The public responded favorably to this plea and soon the local architectural firm of Smith, Webber & Healy was retained to draw up plans for the building's conversion. Work began in 1934 and was

completed the following year. Miss Gorton noted that “after being in one room for nearly five years, the library moved into a building with over ten rooms at our disposal. All books were moved from the schoolhouse and placed in the middle of a large room. During the summer the library staff sorted, carried and arranged books for two months. Fortunately, I had very efficient help....” The library officially opened for business in its new home on 1 August 1935.

The Old Federal Building

The Old Federal Building, home of the Rutland Free Library for the past 71 years, is one of Rutland’s most distinguished structures. The building bears the imprint of two important men. The first is Solomon Foot (1802-1866), U.S. Senator from Vermont, president pro tempore of the Senate under President Lincoln, and a trusted ally of the wartime president. Foot was born in Cornwall, Vermont, but early on came to Rutland where he established himself as an attorney and civic leader. As a senator he was able to secure the funds for a federal courthouse for his adopted city.

The other significant figure is the building’s architect, Ammi Burnham Young (1798-1874). Born in Lebanon, N.H., he had executed such distinguished commissions as “Dartmouth Row” in Hanover, N.H., and St. Paul’s Church in Burlington. His crowning achievement from this period was the second Vermont State House in Montpelier, described at that time as “one of the finest specimens of Grecian architecture in the United States.” From 1852 to 1862 Young held the post of Supervising Architect of the United States Treasury. In the mid-1850’s he was asked to undertake the designs for a new federal building in Rutland and an identical one in Windsor.

The Rutland courthouse is an example of Greek Revival style with Italianate detailing. It was built of Boston pressed brick on a foundation of Vermont granite at a cost variously estimated to be between \$56,000 and \$80,000. B. F. Colby and a Mr. Bird were the contractors with J.J.R. Randall serving as superintendent of construction. Iron was used for the interior columns and beams while on the exterior it was used for cornices and quoins as well as decoration around doors and windows.

The building was erected half way between the old town center along Main Street Park and the new railroad-generated downtown which was springing up along Merchants Row. It was an attempt to service both the old center and the new center of

town. An early photograph of the courthouse in *Rutland in Retrospect* shows it unsoftened by any landscaping and bordered by a Center Street that is little more than a muddy track. It was to this courthouse that the remains of Senator Foot were brought to rest in state in March 1866. The casket of the man whom Mary Lincoln had described as a "noble friend" was conveyed up Center Street in the rain by four white horses, finely robed and with white plumes on their heads.

An intriguing feature of the building is the basement jail cells. There are three of the seven-by-ten foot cells, each with walls up to two feet thick, low and arched medieval ceilings, and doors made of strap iron and heavy plates that admit no light.

It appears that "only one person has been confined in the prison and he only for a day and a night." There are many stories about the cells that are apocryphal tales. It is claimed that during the Prohibition period federal agents used the cells to store stocks of seized liquor. This could have some truth. During the Cold War era the cells were used by the city's civil defense office to store folding cots and survival rations. The cell area was envisioned as a command post in the event of nuclear attack.

During World War II and the postwar years the library flourished. It offered a film series designed to provide better understanding of our allies Russia and China. A phonograph that servicemen on leave could use was located in the basement. After the war, veterans seeking information on careers and educational opportunities under the G.I. Bill filled the library. By 1948 circulation was at a high point.

As the decade ended, Mayor Dan Healy slashed \$5,429 from the library budget leaving only \$17,900 for 1950. Library Director Carl W. Hull ordered the immediate cessation of the popular Saturday morning children's films. In early March city voters approved a three-cent library tax thus eliminating the need for further austerity measures and enabling the immediate resumption of the fondly remembered Saturday morning movies.

By the end of the 1950s shortage of space was again growing acute. Librarian John T. Osborne placed the need for an expanded children's room before local service clubs. He noted that while 2,300 children were registered for library cards there were only desks and chairs for 18 readers and these, together with 3,300 books, were crowded into a 20 by 26 foot space. Meanwhile, in the reference room it was not uncommon to find 65 to 70 students vying for about half that many chairs.

In March 1960 city voters considered a 12-cent special tax for two years designed to raise the \$70,000 construction cost of the needed addition. This special tax was rejected by a decisive 2700 to 1800 vote margin. Three years passed with little visible progress, but then a surprise donation of \$30,000 from Rutland attorney and civic figure Edwin W. Lawrence supplied new momentum. By late summer of the following year construction had begun on a new two-story addition, financed by 75% federal funds and containing doubled children's space, a full basement, and appropriately a Lawrence Reading Room.

The financial problems that had dogged the library for so much of its life were much alleviated in 1969 when it became the recipient of a generous endowment from the estate of Mrs. Nella Grimm Fox. Mrs. Fox's father, Gustav Grimm, had established a family business manufacturing evaporators and other equipment for the maple sugaring industry in Ohio in the 1880s. He later relocated the business to Rutland. Upon his death in 1914, Nella took over and ran the business through 1951, amassing considerable wealth. Following her death on 12 October 1969, \$1 million was left in trust for three local institutions: the Congregational Church, Rutland Hospital and the library. Annually this sum produced \$30,000 in interest. This bequest was originally earmarked for books and periodicals but later broadened to assist with programs and other activities. Subsequently renamed in Mrs. Fox's honor, the Nella Grimm Fox Room today displays many of the furnishings and Oriental carpets that once adorned the her home on Grove Street.

The new addition and the complete refurbishment of the Fox Room in 1974 were both undertaken during the tenure of Charles D. Maurer, who had become library director in 1963. In 1972 Jacob Sherman was hired as the cataloger. Over the years Sherman's role was expanded to include reference, interlibrary loan, and audiovisual acquisition. His 34-year tenure is the longest of current employees. The Maurer years also brought a new emphasis on programming and saw the hiring of a succession of program directors including Jean Swain, Pat Bates, Deborah Ramage, Julie Teta, and Carolyn Crowley Meub, all of whom kept the Fox Room alive with a succession of lectures, panels, concerts, meetings, and children's programs.

The Last Twenty Years

With the retirement of Charles Maurer at the end of 1986 following 23 years at the library's helm, there ensued a six-month interim during which the affairs of the library were co-managed by

children's librarian Carol Chatfield and the technical services and reference librarian Jake Sherman. Early in the summer of 1987 Paula Baker assumed the reins as Head Librarian. She had previously served as a department head at the public library in her hometown of Toledo, Ohio.

The library board soon charged Baker with instituting an ambitious program of expansion and renovation. One overriding concern was the need for an elevator to bring the library into compliance with the new handicap accessibility codes governing public facilities. It was also felt that this was an opportunity to build a full addition and create needed space for the future.

Plans for the new addition soon gained momentum and the need for funding the project took center stage. A Bennington architect drew up initial plans and a bond issue was proposed. Since the library is housed in a city-owned building, Paula Baker, the Library Director, approached the Board of Aldermen and received the Board's endorsement. She also spoke before numerous community and service groups in support of the bond. However, it failed to pass on the first attempt. At this point a new proposed plan was drafted by local architects Nimtz, Berryhill & Figiel with Alvin Figiel serving as lead architect. He displayed boldness by situating the elevator in the original 1858 building and creating a lobby out of what had previously been part of the reference and audio-visual areas. At the same time he showed sensitivity to the building's rich historical features and blended the exterior of the proposed addition to echo Ammi Young's original. The bond issue to carry out the project was now at \$900,000. Again Paula Baker took to the airwaves and made the rounds of community groups. This time her efforts were greeted with success as the community approved the plan by a comfortable margin. Much credit was also owed to the efforts of Richard Smith, board president at the time.

Preparing the library for construction was a project in itself. The children's librarian Carol Chatfield assumed a lead role in this phase. It was planned that during the nine months of anticipated construction the library would operate out of a temporary location in the downtown shopping plaza.

The first step was to select a core collection of high demand books and other media for the temporary library. Then virtually every one of the 90,000 books in the collection had to be packed up in boxes, labeled, and hauled out of the building. The vast majority not selected for the temporary location, were shipped off to a commercial building on North Main Street. Doing the heavy lifting was an array of

volunteers and staffers joined by inmates from the Rutland County Correctional Center. Shelves had to be disassembled. Those not destined for reassembly at the plaza had to be stored. Furnishings, ranging from utilitarian desks and chairs to 19th century landscapes by Vermont artist James Hope and a grandfather clock that is one of the library's treasures all had to be moved. During the fall of 1989 and the winter and spring of 1990 the library operated out of the Plaza.

Though it had seemed endless, construction was completed pretty much on schedule and the library was able to return to an expanded and brightened home. The children's room, which had previously occupied the north side of the building, now was accorded three spacious, mostly east-facing rooms into which sunlight poured through large windows. The reference desk that had been an old standard-issue desk now was transformed into a wood-paneled island in the center of the library from which patrons could be served by two librarians. The circulation desk was a similar type enclosure that now faced west instead of east and was served by its own office. Periodicals that had previously been displayed on wooden racks that obscured much of the cover were now displayed on contemporary shelving that afforded the cover full exposure. The library's outstanding local history and genealogy collection in the Vermont Room was moved from the second floor to larger quarters on the first floor. This collection is a consistent magnet for researchers, many from out of state,

The next major change was the disappearance of the card catalog in favor of a computerized catalog. This project began about 1992. A first step was shipping off in-house catalog card records to a Texas company for conversion to machine-readable form. Before long many who were used to thumbing through card drawers in search of their reading matter were scratching their heads in front of computer screens. Often it was the older generation that found the change most disconcerting. Comments such as "I sure miss those card files" and "I'm afraid I'm computer illiterate" were heard frequently.

For several years the library's computers utilized a system known as Multilis that enabled the patron to look up resources within the library but did not offer online capabilities. For the past several years the library has been using a system known as I-Bistro from an Alabama-based company called Sirsi that has been quite successful nationally. Using I-Bistro (the name is apparently intended to convey a full "bistro" line of services), the library user can reserve or renew a book or check into the status of the individual's

personal account. In many cases a photo of the book's cover and a substantial review of its content as well links to other books in the collection on the topic can be found. The system also offers access to the Library of Congress and, most dramatically, to the World Wide Web.

Today, the library user doesn't even have to come to the library. From a home computer it is possible to access the library's home page (www.rutlandfree.org) and remotely explore either the catalog or one of the many online databases offered either by the library itself or through a statewide consortium known as Vermont Online Library. Full text articles from over a hundred newspapers as well as thousands of periodicals and journals, many of them highly specialized and esoteric and in physical form owned only by the very largest libraries, can be found here.

While the vast majority of days in the library are hardly the stuff of headlines, in 1995 the library did become involved in a censorship case that generated national attention. It all began when a local resident requested that a book for young children entitled "Daddy's Roommate," a story depicting a child being raised by gay parents, receive special treatment and be placed on an upper shelf where it would be out of reach of children and could only be accessed by parents or an adult. Library Director Paula Baker, with the support of national and state library associations, staff, and many if not most in the community, stood firm in insisting that the book be treated like any other children's story book and be shelved in its proper alphabetical place. For a while the issue created a good deal of polarization in the community. Ultimately it was decided to hold a public hearing in the Nella Grimm Fox Room at which all shades of opinion could be voiced. Today it is hard to picture the tense and jam-packed room where, under the glare of TV lights, ordinary folks and "experts" had their say while reporters from national dailies jotted in their notebooks and a glamorous network TV correspondent hovered. The feared rancorous scenes never materialized and under the measured gavel of Rutland attorney Theodore Corsones, the moderator, all sides conducted themselves well and the library's position was subsequently upheld.

In 1998 the American Library Association's Intellectual Freedom Roundtable recognized the library's adherence to principle in this case by awarding to Paula Baker and five community members its John Phillip Immroth Intellectual Freedom Award.

The advent of computers has changed the atmosphere of library. It has become a place of busy comings and goings as individuals come in to use the computers for personal and practical affairs. Almost

overnight, it seems, e-mail has become the world's preferred form of communication. Local libraries have become a mecca for vacationers and travelers anxious to use a computer to check in with the folks back home and perhaps pay a few bills while on the road. The public arrives daily to use library for everything from online banking and airline reservations to apartment hunting and concert tickets.

The library continues to cater to children and young adults. Under the direction of children's librarian June Osowski, children are drawn to the library by means of storyhours and summer reading programs as well as crafts workshops and entertainment offerings. Youngsters are rarely more delighted than when their reading efforts win them a special prize of their very own new book. They are encouraged to read Dorothy Canfield Fisher and other prize-winning titles, but it must be admitted that their tastes often run to paperback horror or sci-fi series.

Thanks in large measure to the efforts of assistant director Alex Beswick-Couturier, a young adult area has been established with whimsical furnishings and décor designed to appeal to that age bracket. Adolescents spend a good deal of time on the computers exploring sites such as "myspace" and playing seemingly incomprehensible games, but they also show a surprising penchant for good old-fashioned checkers. A recent hot reading trend among this group has been "graphic novels" (don't call them comic books), often emanating from Japan and presented in the back-to-front "manga" style. Fortunately, one of the staff members, Heather Ruelke, is knowledgeable of this genre and has guided the creation of a considerable collection.

A particular challenge for Rutland as well as other libraries is today's explosion of media formats. Once the library had only to worry about expending its materials budget on books and magazines while today there are audiocassettes, books on CD-ROM, music CDs, videocassettes, and DVDs. The audio formats have become very popular with seniors and those with vision problems as well as with commuters and travelers who like to use their driving time to expand their minds with a good book. Unfortunately, these products are expensive, wear out, and can be replaced by new technologies in a surprisingly short period of time. The demand for videos and DVDs is insatiable, particularly since July 2005 when the library finally complied with the urgings of the State Department of Libraries and began circulating them at no charge.

The last two decades have witnessed significant changes in staff organization. In the early 1990s the position of assistant director was

created. The circulation department meanwhile was placed under the leadership of a supervisor who would be responsible for scheduling and policies. This position is presently filled by Deborah Higgins, a veteran of over 30 years at the library who has been closely involved with the computerization process from its outset.

The circulation staff has the most day-to-day contact with the public and is greatly responsible for its impressions of the library. Current members of this staff are: Caroline Marotti, who has been with the library for over 25 years, Gretchen Nichol, Anita Waite, Heather Ruelke, Liz McRae and Matthew Roy.

Two other vital staff members are Ronald Lurvey, who has recently completed over 20 years of service as the custodian, and Rhoda Horne, who for over 19 years as bookkeeper has managed the library's payroll and accounts.

In the late 1980s and the early 1990s the non-administrative staff unionized and formed a chapter in Local #1201 of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). In subsequent years, employees of at least two other Vermont public libraries also affiliated with AFSCME.

Looking toward the future, the Rutland Free Library faces a number of issues and concerns. Financing remains at the top of the list. Despite generous tax support over the years from Rutland City, and the towns of Rutland Town, Mendon, Ira, and Tinmouth, costs of operation have to be carefully monitored, particularly when there are sharp rises in necessities such as fuel oil. There is no direct state aid for public libraries. Fortunately, the Vermont-based Freeman Foundation made the state's public libraries its priority a few years ago and made available millions of dollars in grant money. In Rutland, between 2003 and 2005, the library received over \$500,000 in grant aid that funded everything from new materials to major improvements to the physical plant. This included a complete renovation and painting upstairs and down, new flooring and carpeting, new shelving, and the welcome addition of air conditioning throughout the building.

The Friends of the Rutland Free Library meet regularly with the goal of devising ways to benefit the library and raise funds for special needs. In 2006 this group conducted a series of Monday evening book sales throughout the summer. Earlier in 2006 the Friends were an important aid to the trustees in mounting a Vermont Authors Dinner on April 29 in celebration of the library's 120th anniversary. This event attracted some of the state's best-known writers and artists and raised \$30,000 for the library. The library also benefits from the efforts

of an active corps of volunteers, some of whom have devoted several hours a week over a period of years to functions such as book mending, technical processing, shelf reading, and maintaining a scrapbook.

The advent of the computer is altering library life in other ways. By yielding almost immediate access to the catalogs of other libraries throughout the state, it has facilitated and increased the use of interlibrary loan. As a tool at the information desk, it has proved incredibly handy in matters such as producing the lyrics of a song or the complete text of a poem. Information on obscure scientists or little known volcanoes or protozoans that once would have been all but impossible to retrieve, can now be summoned in seconds. The need for large and expensive print reference collections, that libraries have traditionally maintained, is being reevaluated. Moreover with interlibrary loan readily available it may not be necessary for the local library to acquire or retain books of limited interest. The library's long range plan takes these trends into account as it seeks to develop new and innovative ways to serve the community.

Were Julia Dorr and the 63 Rutland ladies that gathered at the home of Mary Daniel on that January day in 1886 able to see and inspect the evolution of their handiwork, there is no doubt they would be pleased. The Rutland Free Library is housed in a solid and historic structure. It maintains a fine collection, and serves more area citizens in more ways than ever before. As to the nobility of its mission, no more moving words were uttered than those expressed nearly 120 years ago by Julia P. Humphrey, the first librarian, who in her first annual report in 1887 wrote:

"If you heard what comes to the ears of the librarian, of the blessing these books are to poor people, of the mothers who can keep their boys at home now they have a good story to read, of the invalids who don't know how they could have borne their affliction except for this library, you might feel an abundant assurance that your work has not returned unto you desolate. And so, when we try to tell you of the library's activities and usefulness in our written reports, we trust that you can truly feel that the unwritten story is by far the greater and better part."